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Grammy-nominated Harpist Yolanda Kondonassis Performs Jennifer Higdon's Harp Concerto with the Wichita Symphony Orchestra



Saturday, January 25, 2020 at 7:30pm and Sunday, January 26, 2020 at 3pm
Century II Concert Hall | 225 W Douglas Ave | Wichita, KS

Tickets: \$25-\$70 and more information available at www.wichitasymphony.org or 316.267.7658

"Higdon's concerto ... is a delight ... Throughout, Kondonassis' playing is a delicious thrill." – *Gramophone*

www.yolandaharp.com

Wichita, KS – On **Saturday, January 25, 2020 at 7:30pm** and **Sunday, January 26, 2020 at 3pm**, internationally acclaimed and Grammy-nominated harpist **Yolanda Kondonassis** performs Pulitzer Prize winner **Jennifer Higdon's Harp Concerto** with the **Wichita Symphony Orchestra** led by Daniel Hege in Century II Concert Hall (225 W Douglas Avenue). Kondonassis' recording of Higdon's Harp Concerto is nominated for a 2020 **Grammy Award** in the **Best Classical Instrumental Solo** category. The album, *American Rapture*, was recorded live with the Rochester Philharmonic led by Ward Stare and released May 17, 2019 on Azica Records. The concerto is also nominated for Best Contemporary Classical Composition. The Grammy Awards ceremony will take place on Sunday, January 26, 2020.

Yolanda Kondonassis has previous ties to Wichita as the first prize recipient of the Naftzger Young Artists Auditions & Awards in 1988. This national competition for advanced music students takes place in Wichita every spring, is administered by the Wichita Symphony and made possible by The Naftzger Fund for Fine Arts, Inc. Yolanda's January 25 and 26 performances with the Wichita Symphony have been underwritten by The Naftzger Fund for Fine Arts.

Jennifer Higdon, one of the greatest musical voices of our time, wrote and dedicated her Harp Concerto to Kondonassis. Higdon says, "I love writing concerti because it gives me a chance to not only explore the different instruments' qualities, but also because I get to experience the joy of the performer in displaying those qualities. Yolanda Kondonassis' enthusiasm for her instrument is infectious."

Kondonassis echoes, "The journey of bringing Jennifer Higdon's Harp Concerto to life has been an amazing ride. We agreed on many aspects of what a new harp concerto should be – strong, agile, lyrical, feisty, energetic and even heroic when necessary; I wanted it to be challenging, but really fun to play and with a groove that would allow the

harpist to catch a musical wave with the orchestra once in a while. Jennifer managed all this and more, delivering a work that is all at once powerful, heart-wrenching, whimsical, and original.”

Of the world premiere performance in May 2018, *Rochester City Paper* notes, “Higdon was keen to showcase the harp's naturally rich harmonic colors, and there was something prayerful about Kondonassis' playing, particularly in the quieter moments,” and “Sonically, the presence of Kondonassis' harp seemed to signify magic at work, in the throes of a hectic and sobering reality, as played by the orchestra . . . The vibraphone and bells reinforced the divine character of Kondonassis' tone, and something akin to Renaissance song in Higdon's melodies only heightened the mystery.” In the final movement, the critic observes, “The previously conventional concerto acquired a welcome avant-garde, dance-like quality.”

This Wichita Symphony Orchestra Masterworks program explores a tapestry of symphonic voices on the theme of America, including **George Walker**'s *Lyric for Strings* and **Antonin Dvořák**'s Symphony No. 9, "New World."

Yolanda Kondonassis is celebrated as one of the world's premier solo harpists and is widely regarded as today's most recorded classical harpist. With “a range of colour that's breathtaking” (*Gramophone*), she has been hailed as “a brilliant and expressive player” (*Dallas Morning News*), with “a dazzling technique unfailingly governed by impeccable musical judgment” (*Detroit News*). She has appeared around the globe as a concerto soloist and in recital, bringing her unique brand of musicianship and warm artistry to an ever-increasing audience. Also a published author, speaker, professor of harp, and environmental activist, her many passions are woven into a vibrant and multi-faceted career. With hundreds of thousands of discs and downloads sold worldwide, Kondonassis' extensive discography includes twenty titles and her 2008 release, *Air* (Telarc), was nominated for a Grammy Award. *Ginastera: One Hundred*, celebrates Ginastera's 2016 centennial and was released in October 2016 on Oberlin Music. Her many albums have earned universal critical praise as she continues to be a pioneering force in the harp world, striving to push the boundaries of what listeners expect of the harp. The recipient of two Solo Recitalists Grants from the National Endowment for the Arts and a 2011 recipient of the Cleveland Arts Prize, Kondonassis has been featured on CNN and PBS as well as Sirius/XM Radio's *Symphony Hall*, NPR's *All Things Considered* and *Tiny Desk Concerts*, *St. Paul Sunday Morning*, and *Performance Today*. In addition to her active solo, chamber music and recording schedule, Kondonassis heads the harp departments at Oberlin Conservatory of Music and The Cleveland Institute of Music, and presents masterclasses around the world. For more information, visit www.YolandaHarp.com.

Jennifer Higdon, Pulitzer Prize and two-time Grammy winner, is one of the most performed living American composers working today. She is a major figure in contemporary Classical music, receiving the 2010 Pulitzer Prize in Music for her Violin Concerto, a 2010 Grammy for her Percussion Concerto and a 2018 Grammy for her Viola Concerto. Most recently, Higdon received the prestigious Nemmers Prize from Northwestern University which is given to contemporary classical composers of exceptional achievement who have significantly influenced the field of composition. She has also been the recipient of a Guggenheim, Koussevitzky, and Pew Fellowships, as well as two awards from the American Academy of Arts & Letters. Higdon enjoys several hundred performances a year of her works, and *blue cathedral* is one of today's most performed contemporary orchestral works, with more than 600 performances worldwide. Her works have been recorded on more than sixty CDs. Higdon's first opera, *Cold Mountain*, won the prestigious International Opera Award for Best World Premiere and the opera recording was nominated for 2 Grammy awards. Dr. Higdon holds the Rock Chair in Composition at The Curtis Institute of Music in Philadelphia. Her music is published exclusively by Lawdon Press. For more information, visit www.jenniferhigdon.com.

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